

~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
22 SEPT 99

NORTH KOREA REMAINS UNYIELDING IN PUEBLO CRISIS

The North Koreans show no signs of retreating from the confrontation with the US provoked by their seizure of the Pueblo and its crew.

They appear to be gambling on the assumption that, by holding the crew as hostages, they can deter US military reprisals, force the US to restrain the South Koreans, and prolong the

confrontation. Their immediate aim apparently is to maintain diversionary pressures on the US at a high level during the current country-wide Communist offensive in South Vietnam. Over the longer term, Pyongyang probably hopes these tactics will aggravate US - South Korean relations, discredit the Seoul government, and extract valuable concessions from the US.

~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

TOP SECRET

The North Koreans are continuing the defiant stance they adopted during the Military Armistice Commission meeting on 24 January. In official statements and propaganda, Pyongyang has maintained it acted within its rights as a sovereign state, and that the Pueblo was engaged in hostile activity in North Korean territorial waters. Pyongyang has attempted to document its version of the incident by broadcasting an alleged confession and other statements by the commander of the Pueblo. Moreover, Communist propaganda has attempted to connect the Pueblo with the war in Vietnam. The commander was said to have stated his mission was in preparation for a "new war" of aggression in Asia and that the US regards Korea and Vietnam as "two fronts of the war."

The North Koreans have avoided specifying conditions for the release of the Pueblo and its crew. Pyongyang has, however, repeatedly condemned efforts to involve the UN. A high-ranking North Korean leader complained on 31 January that the US was seeking a solution through "illegal discussions at the United Nations." He went on to observe that "there is a precedent for the treatment of similar cases at the Korean Military Armistice Commission."

This "precedent" probably refers to negotiations at Panmunjom in 1963-64 over the fate of two US helicopter pilots downed in North Korea. In its desire to extract maximum propaganda value from that case, how-

ever, Pyongyang kept the negotiations going for 13 months before releasing the pilots.

Despite their militant stance, nothing the North Koreans have done suggests they are about to embark on large-scale hostilities.

Propaganda statements claim that the country is "prepared to counter any provocations or surprise invasion."

DMZ incidents were above normal at the beginning of the week but now consist of a few small skirmishes without casualties.

Soviet military reaction to the Pueblo seizure has been mainly limited to naval activity.

Sur-face ships have been deployed in the Sea of Japan to monitor US naval task forces operating in these waters.

On the diplomatic front, the Soviet Union has supported the North Korean position while treating the incident as a matter to be resolved between the

TOP SECRET

~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

US and North Korea. Moscow's tactics appear designed to minimize the situation and to forestall any possible US military action, while keeping their public record of support for North Korea unassailable. Premier Kosygin reflected this line in his statement to Western reporters in New Delhi, saying that the incident was a violation of territorial waters and should be settled as such by the two countries involved.

The Soviets voted against the matter being brought before the Security Council but have indicated a willingness to have North Korea invited to appear before the council as long as the invitation is unconditional. The Security Council has been stalemated over the issue of inviting North Korea to attend.

Peking's reaction to the Pueblo incident has been relatively restrained and has avoided any specific reference to steps China might take to support Pyongyang. Although the Chinese Government statement on 28 January warned that "US imperialism had forgotten the lesson it was

taught in the Korean War," it promised only that the "Chinese Government and people firmly support the just stand" of North Korea. The statement seemed primarily intended to portray the Pueblo's capture as further evidence of US plans to expand the war in Vietnam--a favorite theme of recent Chinese propaganda.

[REDACTED]

Another sign of South Korean uneasiness was a suggestion in a Seoul newspaper editorial on 31 January that the government might have to consider withdrawing troops from South Vietnam if the US reduced its forces in the Korean area following a settlement of the Pueblo crisis. [REDACTED]

~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]